



Richmond Community Alliance
Encouraging constructive community engagement and action

NEWSLETTER

No. 18 June 2, 2024

Richmond Municipal Budget Referendum Monday 8am-8pm–Town Hall

Peaks

RCA Reliable Source of Information for Local Elections – Event on June 20

In November there will be local elections for Town Council and School Committee. It can be very difficult to obtain information about local candidates because the news media focus on national and state candidates. One reason we formed RCA was to be a reliable source of information about candidates for local offices. So on June 20, RCA is hosting a Summer Solstice Cookout fundraiser from 6:00–9:00 pm at Alaina’s Ale House (343 Kingstown Road). RCA will use money from this fundraiser to support our efforts for voter information on issues and candidates during the upcoming election cycle. Attendees will be able to chat with our steering committee members, and share thoughts on what they feel is important when considering candidates for the upcoming election. The menu will be burgers, hot dogs, veggie burgers, fries and salad. Tickets \$35 per person click to purchase – <https://donorbox.org/events/609431> We will also have a basket-affle. Can’t make it? You can still donate <https://donorbox.org/the-richmond-community-alliance>.

Chariho High School Ranked in Top 10

Once again, Chariho High School was in the top 10 high schools in Rhode Island in the annual rankings by *U.S. News & World Report*. CHS was ranked #10 based upon an analysis that includes state assessment proficiency in mathematics, reading and science, graduation rates and availability and performance on advanced placement college-level courses. CHS also was ranked in the top 10 in 2023.

Chariho Tech Strikes Gold

Students from Chariho Tech took home many gold medals at the Rhode Island SkillsUSA competition in April. Eighteen students won gold in 13 individual and team competitions. They

will now compete in the SkillsUSA nationals in Texas. Although students regularly win medals at the state competition, this was believed to be one of Chariho Tech's most successful years. First place winners at the state competition included Ella Murphy in baking and pastry; Erin vonHousen in architectural drafting; Preston Jaruta in carpentry; Mia McNiece, Tori Babineau and Emerson Flynn in crime scene investigation; Elijah Henley in electrical construction wiring; Abby Heim in health occupations; Aidan Calianos in marine service technology; Amber Lambert in nursing; Caleb Caswell, Colin Cooley, Noah Dinucci and Lucas Holloway in teamworks; Tucker Sargent in technical drafting; Parker Slaughenhaupt in welding; Grace Marcotte in welding sculptures and Benjamin Costa in information technology services.

Valleys

Opposition to School Repair Bond

Chariho's bond for new elementary schools and main campus repairs failed, but infrastructure problems remain. Vocal opposition to new schools routinely pointed out that repairs were the appropriate way to go. No opposition existed for the needed repairs at the main campus. These repairs include a new roof for the Career and Technical Center, the replacement of a deteriorated skylight in the Middle School atrium, security upgrades, and generator replacement for all three main campus buildings.

The same politicians and political operatives that mobilized against new elementary schools are now doing the same against repairs. Many of them claimed ignorance or a lack of preparation to address these problems. This stance is interesting, since these repairs were listed in the previous bond and had been approved by the RI Department of Education. Now that the \$150 million bond has been defeated, these particular issues can be fast tracked while the elementary school projects have to be addressed starting from Stage 1 which is a months long process that involves additional expense from the architect. What could be the reason for opposition to repairs now?

Maybe the words of School Committee member Polly Hopkins (from Hopkinton) can show us the way. She stated in a Facebook post "until we are free to have school choice and bankrupt these schools we will tackle this beast head on." Such a statement would lead a reasonable person to surmise that any project, no matter what the cost, will be met with opposition to bring about the deterioration of our schools to achieve their end goal of dismantling Chariho..

Fortunately, the bond language passed 6-5. Jessica Purcell and Karen Reynolds from Richmond voted with the majority to approve, while Richmond's other members, Kathryn Colasante and Patricia Pouliot, opposed the measure.

Opinion Corner...

Should the Town of Richmond Settle Tax Dispute with The Preserve?

By Jeff Noble

The question of The Preserve, and its property taxes, may be one of the most polarizing issues in our fair town. As seen from the Executive Session agenda items from the Richmond Town Council special meeting on May 21, the town and The Preserve have ongoing lawsuits regarding property assessments. If the town agrees to settle by reducing the assessments of properties in The Preserve, what would the consequence be for the people of Richmond?

The answer is... higher taxes. See, Richmond has a flat property tax rate. The rate is applied evenly to commercial or residential property based on that property's fair market value as of December 31 of the previous year. Any action that does not result in the use of the full fair market value of a property to assess it for taxes, means that tax burden has to be spread around to the rest of the community. Any reduction in taxes assessed at The Preserve will need to be made up by property owners throughout the rest of Richmond.

Many people would argue that The Preserve warrants such special consideration because they require less services. Some have argued that reducing their tax rate would increase tax revenue for the town over the long run. While the first argument seems compelling, why not give a tax break to everyone who uses less government services? For the simple reason that public goods such as fire, police, and education are for the society as a whole and not targeted individuals. The second argument is even more ridiculous since the addition of valued property at the Preserve will lower the tax rate for everyone... including those homeowners.

See, the homeowners at The Preserve are the ones who pay the property tax. The Preserve itself is the entity that builds and maintains them. Why should this group of property owners be given a break?

It is my opinion that the Richmond Town Council should not settle or negotiate away tax revenue without public input. Hopefully they will not forget about Joe or Jill Schmo taxpayer who will foot the bill.

Other Items of Note

Town Budget Goes to Public Vote June 3

The Richmond municipal budget to be considered by voters on June 3 in an all day referendum. Municipal expenses are up 2.83% with the biggest driver being a 3.3% increase in personnel expenses. Capital expenses are decreasing 0.5% and debt service is decreasing by 1.8%. The increase in expenses will be offset by an increase in tax revenue from residential properties due to new construction and improvements. Under the proposed budget the tax rate is anticipated to

decrease by ten cents to \$14.66 per thousand dollars of assessed value. Polls will be open at Town Hall on June 3rd from 8am - 8pm for the budget referendum.

Upcoming Meetings

June 3 – Municipal Budget Referendum 8 am – 8 pm at Town Hall

June 4 – Town Council Meeting – 6 pm at Town Hall

June 11 – Planning Board Meeting – 6:30 pm at Town Hall

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

June 7 - Chariho High School Graduation – 7 pm URI Ryan Center, open to public

June 8 - Warwick Symphony Orchestra Free Concert – 5 pm at Washington County FairGrounds

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.