



Richmond Community Alliance
Encouraging constructive community engagement and action

NEWSLETTER

No. 10 February 4, 2024

Peaks

Support for Richmond Community Alliance at Friend-raising Event

THANK YOU to all who attended our first public event on January 25. We enjoyed seeing familiar faces and meeting new neighbors. We look forward to hosting more events in the future and hope to see you there!

New Town Solicitor Named

After reviewing candidates to provide legal services to the town in a closed executive session at last week's special meeting, the Town Council unanimously appointed attorney Christopher Zangari as the new Town Solicitor. Zangari's term begins February 1, and expires January 31, 2025. He replaces outgoing solicitor Karen Ellsworth. We welcome Mr. Zangari and thank Ms. Ellsworth for her many years of service to Richmond.

Valleys

Vaillancourt Out as Town Electrical Inspector

At the January 30 Town Council meeting, there was a public discussion about the job performance of Electrical Inspector Jeff Vaillancourt for the third time since his appointment in January 2023. Councilor Colasante recused himself from the process due to conflicts of interest. The Town Administrator reported that she had fielded ongoing complaints from businesses and local residents about Vaillancourt's attitude and work ethic, including unreturned phone calls, missed inspections, foul language, intimidation, excessive unnecessary work requirements, and attempts to cultivate work for his personal business through his role as inspector (which would be an ethics code violation). All of this, added to the fact that the town's largest business and largest event refuse to work with him – which would require the town to spend additional taxpayer dollars to hire alternate electrical inspectors to do the work at those facilities. Council President Trimmer noted, "it's gotten to a point where the liability outweighs the benefit." After

a lengthy review and discussion, the Town Councilors Trimmer, Nassaney and Wilcox voted to terminate Vaillancourt's employment effective immediately. Councilor Sheehan abstained.

Other Items of Note

Town Ethics Training

Town Council and School Committee members, board and commission volunteers, and staff were invited to participate in an ethics training administered by RI Ethics Commission prior to the special meeting. Lynne Radiches, Esq from the RI Ethics Commission provided a one-hour training session to review the state code of ethics and answer any questions. All of Richmond's Town Council and Chariho School Committee members attended along with many board and commission members. RCA members Mark Reynolds, Dan Madnick and Jim Palmisciano participated.

Premature and Uninformed Opinions Hurt Public Understanding

Council President Trimmer put an item on the agenda for this week's Town Council meeting (Tuesday, February 6) to discuss "creating a resolution opposing the Chariho New School Initiative and Stage II RIDE application." Here is our open letter to him regarding his response to Chariho Superintendent Gina Picard's presentation at the Town Council on January 16 and this resolution.

Dear Council President Trimmer:

We are frustrated and disappointed with the way you have handled the proposal to build three new Chariho elementary schools (one for Richmond). Instead of listening to the information being presented by Supt Picard and asking questions about the alternative proposals, you used this as a platform to state your preconceived opinion about the current state of our public schools. In accordance with the Chariho Act, how to deal with our aging elementary school buildings that are 80-90 yrs old is an issue to be decided by the voters, not the Town Council. Therefore your focus should have been on eliciting as much information as possible for residents so that they can make an informed decision when they vote in May.

You questioned the amount of the maintenance costs needed for the existing building, but you failed to ask about the projected amount during the Superintendent's presentation to the Town Council on January 16th. What projects are needed? How much will each cost? Where did the estimate come from? Sadly, we also note that you did not participate in any of the school tours that were open to the public, particularly at Richmond Elementary. Had you asked questions or toured the school, you would have learned that there is significant flooding in the basement of Richmond Elementary during heavy rain. Although there are pumps, they cannot keep up with the volume of water. Additionally, the school building has an electrical system that is insufficient for 21st century learning technology. Each classroom has only two electrical

outlets; one is used for the smart board and one for the window air conditioner. That leaves little space for the other technology that needs to be plugged in. There is a local electrician on the Necessity for School Construction Committee who has provided advice that it is not feasible to update the electrical system in the existing building.

You frequently cite your involvement with another old building, the Varnum Armory Museum in East Greenwich as an example that new construction is not needed. We would ask:

- Does the armory have 375 children and 30-40 staff using the facility on a daily basis?
- How many breakfast and lunch meals does the armory serve on a daily basis?
- Are there bathroom facilities for more than 400 people?
- Is it handicapped accessible?
- Does it have security features to limit access to only who are supposed to be there?

We are confident that the answer to each is NO. You're comparing apples and oranges.

We expect our elected officials to be as informed as possible on serious issues such as these before providing their opinions and showing their biases. We urge you to ask more questions or search the many resources that the Charlestown administration and school committee has provided for answers and information. There is plenty of time between now and May to gather information and arrive at a solution that will best support students from Richmond in a way that is fiscally responsible. The Town Council should be spending its time providing information to residents, rather than telling them how to vote. Remember that you represent the town as a whole, and your personal opinion and self-interest does not outweigh the residents you serve.

Community Profile

Richmond Historical Society

Have you ever visited the Bell School House? Or driven past a tiny building in Carolina that once housed the Richmond Town Clerk's office? Would you like to know more about these buildings? Look no further than the Richmond Historical Society, a group of volunteers who oversee the preservation of these two buildings as well as collect, display and interpret historical materials specific to our town.

The Richmond Historical Society was founded in 1968 and today operates as a private non profit with a board of directors, a website <https://www.richmondrihistoricalsoc.org/join-us> and a newsletter. New members and volunteers are always welcome and needed.

In the next 12 months you will be hearing more about the Richmond Historical Society following the passage of a resolution by the Richmond Town Council to join with the RI Secretary of State to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Kristen Chambers, the current president of the Richmond Historical Society, has submitted her application to be part of

that committee. Chambers states: “It was propitious that the 250th anniversary of the USA coincides with the 200th anniversary of Richmond’s Bell School Museum. The RHS had already been looking forward to planning a celebration of the school, which is pictured on the town seal. The formation of the Richmond 250th Commission will allow the RHS and community members to fulfill the RI 250th mission “to commemorate the 250th anniversary of events throughout history which influenced the ideals of freedom, equality and independence in our country. Our purpose is to highlight and acknowledge the significant role Rhode Island has played in the formation of our nation as one of the original 13 colonies. Rhode Islanders will explore the intersection of all people who have impacted that history through coordinated events and curriculum that recognizes the many people who have inhabited these lands.” The Richmond Historical Society always welcomes new members, and with all the work ahead for these two celebrations it’s the perfect time to join!”

Upcoming Meetings

February 6 – Town Council Meeting – 6 pm at Town Hall

February 12 – Necessity of School Construction Committee – 4pm at CHS Library

February 13 – Planning Board Meeting – 6:30 pm at Town Hall

February 13 – Chariho School Committee Meeting – 7:00 pm at CHS Library

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 Giving Events

“Show Some Love” hosted by State Rep. Megan Cotter – February 13 at 6 pm – Tilted Barn
Bring personal care items such as shampoo, tampons, razors, etc., and enjoy a complimentary dinner. Donations will be split between RICAN and the Exeter Department of Social Services. Details: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1057082518863097>

Anchor of Hope Foundation Paint & Sip Fundraiser – February 9 at 6 pm – Pasquale Farms
A portion of the proceeds go directly to AOH Send a Kid to Trade School scholarship fund for a nominated Chariho High School Senior!
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/paint-sip-fundraiser-tickets-803885813107>

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.

