



Richmond Community Alliance  
Encouraging constructive community engagement and action

## **NEWSLETTER**

No. 13 March 17, 2024

**HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY**

**HAPPY ST. JOSEPH'S DAY**

### **Peaks**

#### ***Eight Apply for Three Seats on Building Committee***

At the Chariho annual meeting on March 5 a Building Committee was established to oversee any school construction projects that are approved by voters. In accordance with the Chariho Act, each Town Council appoints three residents to the committee. In Richmond there was an overwhelming response to the town's request for interested persons to apply. Eight residents are seeking appointment to the Building Committee: Bill Day, Dan Madnick, Nancy Pirnie, Andrea Baranyak, Ryan Callahan, Pat Pouliot, Al Robar III, and Mark Trimmer. The Town Council will make its selections at the March 19 meeting. It's great to see so many people step up and want to be part of helping our community.

#### ***Economic Development Commission to Host Shannock Mill Project Tour***

On April 6 at 9 am, the Economic Development Commission (EDC) will host a public tour of the Shannock Mill site with developer Jeffrey Marlowe. Marlowe has been working for years to execute several grants to clean up the Columbia Narrow Fabric Company's mill site in Shannock, with the dreams of revitalizing the area with a mixed use and greenspace. Here is an a piece that appeared in *The Sun* last year about his efforts: [Swamp Yankee Stories: Marlowe brings patience and vision to his Shannock investment | Guest Columns | thewesterlysun.com](#) The tour will begin in Charlestown, by Horseshoe Falls, at the future restaurant site. Coffee and donuts will be provided, and after a brief 10-minute presentation, the tour will begin across the bridge on the Richmond side. EDC member Pete Burton shared that he hopes this tour will provide public understanding of this wonderful opportunity for Richmond, as well as for developing a template for future EDC efforts to highlight other entities ripe for future economic development.

### ***New Town Hall Sign & Message Board***

On March 5, the Town Council approved the use of \$25,000 in ARPA funds for a sign for Town Hall. The design will be similar to the sign at the police department, wooden with granite posts. An electronic message board will be included to make residents aware of information of interest.

## **Valleys**

### ***Senator Morgan Votes Against Legislation to Authorize School Bond Question***

In order for the school bond question to be submitted to voters, the General Assembly must pass legislation authorizing it. In the Senate last week Senator Morgan was the only senator to vote against the legislation. Why does she not want the voters to decide the question? Does she not trust them? So much for being a champion for the will of the people.

## **Other Items of Note**

### ***Chariho Budget Facts***

On March 12 the Chariho School Committee approved the proposed budget for the next fiscal year (2025) that will be voted on by residents in the three towns on April 9. Some of the highlights are:

- Hope Valley School will be phased out over time. There will no longer be kindergarten students enrolled at Hope Valley. Moving forward, kindergarten students will be enrolled at the elementary school that is closest to where they live. The savings for this year's budget will be about \$435,000.
- The total budget is \$58.34 million which is an increase of 2.11%.
- After state aid, the contributions of the Towns will increase overall by 1.40%.
- The contribution of the towns based upon enrollment will increase by: Charlestown 0.36%, Richmond 0.30%, and Hopkinton 3.41%

It is important to note that much of Hopkinton's increase is due to an increase in the number of students from Hopkinton, not increased spending by Chariho. The number of students from Charlestown and Richmond went down from last year. Each town pays a proportional share of the budget based upon the number of students from each town. For the proposed budget the shares will be Charlestown 24.05%, Richmond 37.68%, Hopkinton 38.26%.

There is more information about the proposed budget on Chariho's website: [FY 25 Chariho Regional School District Budget Frequently Asked Questions -Official Copy](#)

### ***Early Voting***

Early voting for the April 2 presidential preference primary has begun and runs through April 1. To cast an early ballot, visit your city/town hall board of canvassers:

<https://elections.ri.gov/canvassers/index.php>

## **Opinion Corner**

**By Jim Palmisciano**

In the March 9<sup>th</sup> edition of her Westerly Sun Swamp Yankee Stories, Betty J. Cotter provided her perspective and some well-needed history on the Chariho school maintenance / repair / construction debate in an article titled *There is no detour from school infrastructure needs*. If you have not yet read the full article, access it [here](#). She is a graduate of the Chariho class of 1978, having gone on to earn an MFA in writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts, as well as publishing two novels and several works on local history.

I found that this article beautifully outlined the history that has brought the Chariho school district to where it is today. Betty provides a perspective on the responsibility the community has to future generations of children to ensure all students in the district have a quality school ecosystem built for 21st century learning.

I reached out to Betty via e-mail to get her comments on some follow-up questions related to the article. She was kind enough to respond immediately so that we could share them in this newsletter..

Betty told me up front that she did not submit her original article to tell the taxpayers how they should vote. She is simply asking us all to take a wider view of the issue, be aware of what she sees as smart choices, and not be driven to a conclusion based on individual talking points or misinformation. Her words as a Chariho alum and native of Charlestown came from her heart. Betty acknowledges that she is not an expert on education but is sharing her own valuable experience as a Chariho graduate and a person with many years observing local politics as a newspaper editor.

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**Jim: In your opinion, why do you think many have forgotten (or choose to neglect) the importance of providing high-quality public education to our children?**

**Betty:** “There is a steady drumbeat of negativity about public schools and has been ever since I was a student. Remember “Why Johnny Can't Read”? Certainly, there are problems in the schools, but the public system of education is an important part of democracy. Lately the national conversation about schools has entered our local politics, where it has no place. School governance should not be about Democrat or Republican talking points. We need to get past that so we can unite in the best interests of the community's children.”

**Jim: There is a choice before Richmond to cover the estimated \$30 million in repairs or \$28 million for new construction. What would you say to those detractors who turn a blind eye to both options and suggest little or no investment for upkeep is needed at all (the spend nothing approach)?**

**Betty:** “I covered this in the column, but basically, it's about self-interest vs. community interest. You will never convince some people to spend money on education. I guess I would just say this: When we were in school, our elders sacrificed to build and add on to these buildings. It's our

responsibility to take care of them or replace them. I am not telling people how to vote, but doing nothing is not sustainable. Would you let your own roof leak, year after year, until it ruined your house?"

**Jim: If we continue to see level funded budgets in Chariho, how do you see this having an impact on the future of our community as a whole?**

**Betty:** "I don't think you can isolate that issue without considering so many others. What will happen to our towns if the housing shortage continues? If the birth rate continues to drop? What effect are short-term rentals having on our school communities? Like it or not, these towns are changing demographically, and we are in a bind. Homeowners are feeling squeezed economically, particularly in Richmond and Hopkinton, and I empathize with them. Yet we still have an obligation to provide a quality education to students. Chariho High School was built in the last years of the baby boom. Now we are in a very different position. And our towns are not alone – South Kingstown is going through a similar phase – it has empty school buildings and rising per-pupil costs. Is increased regionalization the answer? I don't know..." (I am not speaking as an expert on education. I only speak from my experience as a Chariho graduate and my many years of observing local politics as a newspaper editor.). "We probably will end up spending more money, but the issue requires some thoughtful conversations, and money is not the only problem."

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I greatly appreciate Betty taking the time to provide her answers to these follow-up questions and share her unique perspective.

## **Community Profile**

### ***Rhode Island 4-H***

Rhode Island 4-H has many programs, projects, and opportunities for children and teens ages 5 to 18. There are also opportunities for adults to volunteer. The URI 4-H program offers kids hands-on education to develop life skills that will serve them well as individuals and citizens. Children and teens can join community clubs, participate in after-school programs, or become individual members.

A leader in youth development, 4-H began as a local-level response to evolving needs for new kinds of educational experiences for youth. It uses the Cooperative Extension System network to offer youth programs and activities to diverse groups of young people in 3,150 counties across the nation. Children and teens can choose to participate in 4-H through community or project clubs. Community clubs are run year-round by at least two unrelated, trained volunteers and meet once a month. Each community club has its own areas of focus. Monthly meetings last between one and two hours. Participants vote on projects and may participate in year-round 4-H

events. For general info <https://web.uri.edu/4h/> or check out the list of community clubs, many of which are in Richmond or close by [RI 4-H Clubs Contacts.xlsx](#).

## **Upcoming Meetings**

March 19 – Town Council Meeting – 5 pm workshop on flooding mitigation programs; 6 pm regular meeting at Town Hall

March 26 – Planning Board Meeting – 6:30 pm at Town Hall

March 26 – Chariho School Committee – 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](https://www.chariho.k12.ri.us/school_committee/meeting_schedule)

## **Community Calendar**

### ***Bunny Breakfast & Egg Hunt – March 23 9:30 am – Richmond Elementary School***

On Saturday, March 23, Richmond Rec will host an egg hunt at Richmond Elementary School. Breakfast snacks will be provided and the Easter Bunny will make an appearance! Breakfast begins at 9:30 am and the egg hunt starts at 10 am (3-5 year olds at the soccer fields and 6+ year olds at the playground). Please bring your own basket or bag for egg collecting. Contact Rec Director Morgan Cusumano with questions at 401-932-1219 or [recreation@richmondri.com](mailto:recreation@richmondri.com).

### ***Richmond Recreation Summer Camp 2024***

Registration is now open! Camp runs from June 26 to July 28, 9am – 3 pm and is open to Richmond and non-Richmond residents in K-7th grade. Sign up at:

<http://richmondri.com/166/Recreation>

## **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](mailto:rca4richmond@gmail.com). We also welcome any tips or items of concern that you wish to bring to our attention.