



Richmond Community Alliance
Encouraging constructive community engagement and action

NEWSLETTER

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Peaks



Shannock Mill Tour by EDC

On Saturday April 6, the Economic Development Commission hosted a tour of the ongoing Shannock Mill re-development by Jeff Marlowe. Chair Pete Buton explained the work that has been performed to remediate pollution at the prior mill site. This has been made possible by over \$1 million in grants from RIDEM with the required match from Marlowe. The next phase of work will be to remove heavy

bunker oil from the site, and a study of the site to determine what wastewater treatment options will be acceptable. Conceptual renderings of the potential development of residential and commercial uses on the property were displayed. The tour started on the Charlestown side of the Pawcatuck River in the restaurant space currently under construction with additional residential units above the restaurant. The group then moved to the former mill site on the Richmond side of the river (see photo above). The plan is to maintain some of the existing stone walls from the mill, including the turbine room. The plan also includes open community space closest to the river. The history of Shannock is rich and often overlooked. It is great to see Marlowe's commitment (time and financial) to revitalize and restore a polluted industrial site and bring development to Shannock in a way that enhances the village and fits well into the historic surroundings. Town officials and volunteers present were Town Councilor Samantha Wilcox, EDC members Pete Burton and James Brear, Planning Board Vice Chair Dan Madnick, Land Trust member John Davenport, Recreation Commission member Jim Palmisciano, School

Committee members Jessica Purcell and Karen Reynolds, Richmond Historical Society member Kristen Chambers, and Charlestown Planning Commission Vice Chair Frances Topping.

Senator Reed Visits Chariho High School

Students from the life skills program welcomed U.S. Senator Jack Reed to Chariho High School on Friday April 5 to highlight the school's library and to talk about the Right to Read Act sponsored by Reed. The Right to Read Act's goal, according to Reed's office, is to address disparities in access to school library resources and surge federal investment in support of increasing student literacy across America. The life skills program at the high school is a semester-long reading and communications course that endeavors to get students more integrated in the school community. It is great to see our federal representative recognize Chariho. This program is another example of "all kids all the time." Click for more coverage of [Reed's visit in the Westerly Sun](#).

Other Items of Note

Talking About ADUs with Planning Board Member Dan Madnick

What is an Accessory Dwelling Unit?

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is defined as a residential living unit on the same parcel where the primary use is a legally established single-unit or multi-unit dwelling. Most of us know of an ADU as an in-law apartment, granny flat, carriage house, or accessory apartment. An ADU provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons. It can take various forms including, but not limited to a detached unit; a unit that is part of an accessory structure, such as a detached garage; or a unit that is part of an expanded or remodeled primary dwelling such as a basement or converted space above a garage. An ADU can even be the more recently popularized "tiny home"!

The primary function of an ADU is to alleviate the need for building new properties by allowing families to make the necessary adjustments to the living spaces within their own homes. Since 2022, the RI state legislature has been working on enacting new laws governing the creation and zoning of ADU's ([link](#)). These laws will expand where the ADUs can be placed and who is eligible to use them as a residence. For 2024, there is additional legislation intended to expand the use of ADUs for rental units that can be more affordable and widespread than apartment buildings ([link](#)).

How can ADUs benefit Richmond?

According to the HousingWorks RI factbook ([link](#)), 730 residents in Richmond are considered cost-burdened and there are almost no rental units available (<4% of housing stock). There is a gap in the ability of some Richmond residents to afford their homes with no changes in housing costs in the near future.

ADUs are much less expensive to build than principal structures. This means that they are more affordable by virtue of size and housing type, which helps fill Richmond's lacking availability of rental units. Because of the small size, ADUs are unlikely to contribute to an increase in school enrollment and further strain the local tax base. Additionally, ADUs can add much needed housing units without significantly changing the scale or feel of a neighborhood.

An ADU can help relieve some of the cost burden for our seniors, students, and community members, and if rented, could provide an additional source of income for the homeowner. At this time, Richmond has very little long-term elderly affordable housing and ADUs offer our elderly residents the ability to age in place.

Currently, ADUs are only permitted for use by family members. If expanding the ADU legislation is something that you are interested in, please contact Richmond's district 34 senator, Elaine Morgan, and district 39 representative, Megan Cotter.

Proposed Zoning Ordinances in Richmond

The Richmond Planning Board proactively took the opportunity to revise the town zoning ordinance to regulate the usage of ADUs should the current bills within the state legislature become law. Included below is a summary of some of the significant recommended regulations that the Town Council will enact, if no changes are made following public hearing:

- A duplex or two-family structure may have one accessory dwelling unit that is accessory to the larger of the two principal dwelling units.
- No more than one parking space shall be required for the accessory dwelling unit.
- The gross floor area of the accessory dwelling unit shall be no more than 50% of the gross floor area of the principal dwelling, not including unfinished basements, attics, garages, and unenclosed porches; or 800 square feet, whichever is larger, provided, however, that an accessory dwelling unit located in a finished basement may occupy the entire basement.
- The accessory dwelling unit shall be in the same ownership as the principal dwelling. Either the accessory dwelling or the principal dwelling unit must be occupied by the owner of the property.

Additional ADU resources: <https://states.aarp.org/rhode-island/the-abcs-of-adu>

Opinion Corner

The Knives Are Out for Chariho

By Jeff Noble

Every year in April, the citizens of Charlestown, Hopkinton, and Richmond mark the calendar with the Chariho budget referendum. Leading up to the vote is preposterous outrage, storming the internet and newspapers. This year, opponents of the budget cry wolf about a “liberal conspiracy,” “limitless spending,” “unbalanced and unfair advantage,” and “taxpayers are not ATMs.” The attacks then become personal with accusations of nefarious activity by the superintendent, school committee chair, and teachers themselves conspiring together because they are part of a labor union. To what end... who knows. Some detractors feel the mere existence of the public school is a problem.

Careful and thorough analysis shows that the school budget increase is reasonable, responsible, and provides for effective education. There isn't a line item that hasn't been thoroughly vetted with some having a risk of going over during the fiscal year. Watching the process, it's easy to see how compromise and hard work by many people give us a great product.

Comparing the budget to inflation, we also find that it is a more than reasonable increase. Inflation is the gauge by which we compare costs of goods and overall economic performance, making it a vital statistic. Currently, inflation stands at 3.15%. The Chariho budget increase to taxpayers is 1.4% overall. The rise in the price of education is less than the rise in price of groceries, housing, transportation, medical care, and nearly every other good that is consumed daily. Meanwhile, things like social security, wages, and the stock market have all increased at rates above 4%.

Another interesting fact... the cost of tuition at private schools has increased approximately 8% over the last year. Demand for private education cannot account for the entire increase given the economic downturn. Private schools are dealing with the same challenges as everyone else. Comparing the Chariho increase to private school increases further demonstrates a reasonable budget.

Chariho needs to be applauded and supported for what it does. Educating approximately 2,900 students, from three towns, with aging infrastructure, takes a lot of effort. Fortunately, we continue to see successes for our students and staff. Chariho was ranked 7th out of all the public high schools in the state. Despite all the challenges that it faces, it continues to be successful.

Unfortunately numbers, facts, and logic don't have the impact they once did. If truth mattered, the back and forth wouldn't be required. I understand that some people are struggling, but the school is the last place we should look to trim public budgets. The sad fact is that clickbait and talking points are the order of the day. Research, logic, reasonableness, thinking, and strategic planning make way for insults like elitist, liberal, groomer, and edu-crat (mixing both educator and democrat... or bureaucrat).

Reasonable people, of which there are many, would tell you that Chariho isn't perfect but those imperfections don't warrant "level funding" of the schools. Many people have worked to craft a fiscally responsible budget that everyone can support while limiting waste and furthering education. The community cannot throw out the baby with the bathwater. A well-funded school is vital to a prosperous future for our Chariho community.

Community Profile

Is your home Firewise?

In 2023 Rhode Island experienced two wildfires, one in West Greenwich which burned 196 acres and one in Exeter where 286 acres burned. On March 20, 2024 a fire in Charlestown burned approximately 10 acres.

Hope Valley Fire Department responded to the Charlestown fire and, coincidentally, on that very same day Chief Justin Lee in conjunction with Nancy Stairs from RI DEM hosted two workshops related to fire safety at the fire station in Hope Valley.

Stairs, from the Arcadia station of RIDEM-Division of Forest Environment, explained how wildfire-defensible zones can be created around your home with a focus on managing fuels that contribute to risk. Vegetation, brush, leaves under the deck, propane tanks and wood piles are examples of fuels. Managing these fuels can help deter fire from spreading to your home and other structures. Designing a "Defensible Space" around your home includes creating three zones: the area nearest your home, the area farthest from your home up to your property boundary and the area between those two zones. Creating these zones would be specific to the topography of your actual property and could include thinning and pruning trees, eliminating shrubs close to the house, and creating fire breaks. These zones also contribute to increased firefighter safety.

Chief Lee reminded attendees of the importance of 4 inch reflective house numbers, driveways wide enough for fire equipment with sufficient overhead clearance and, optimally, a turnaround area for the fire vehicles.

Worksheets, checklists, and additional details:

<https://www.nfpa.org/Education-and-Research/Wildfire/Firewise-USA>
www.dem.ri.gov/programs/forestry/fire-program/homeowners.php

Upcoming Meetings

April 8 – Economic Development Commission Meeting – 9:15 am at Town Hall

April 9 – Chariho School Committee Meeting – 7:00 pm at CHS Library

April 10 – Town Council Budget Workshop – 4:30 pm at Town Hall

April 11 - Chariho Building Committee Meeting - 5:30 pm at Chariho High School Library

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

April 16 – Town Council Meeting – 6:00 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

Earth Day Clean-up

The Richmond Conservation Commission is coordinating the town wide clean up on April 20 and 21. Clean up kits and instructions available at Town Hall (under orange tent). Put together a team and select the area of town you want to clean up. DPW staff will pick up bags of trash and recyclables that are collected after the weekend.

Huck Finn Fishing Derby

Richmond Recreation will hold this annual event for children on May 11 from 9–10 am at the pond behind Richmond Elementary School. The pond will be stocked before the event by RIDEM.

Richmond Recreation Summer Camp 2023

Registration is now open! Camp runs from June 26 to July 28, 9 am –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. We also welcome any tips or items of concern that you wish to bring to our attention.