



Richmond Community Alliance
Encouraging constructive community engagement and action

NEWSLETTER

No. 16 May 6, 2024

School Bond Referendum Tuesday May 7th 7am - 8pm @ Town Halls

Peaks

On April 26 the Chariho School District was recognized by the R.I. Department of Education with a Green Ribbon award. It was 1 of 5 schools/districts to achieve Green Ribbon status. The Green Ribbon is awarded to schools for their commitment to high-quality sustainability practices in their facilities and environmental education. Recipients are nationally recognized as some of America's most successful educational institutions in reducing environmental impact and costs, improving health and wellness of students and staff, and providing effective sustainability education. Chariho has actively worked to create an efficient and safe physical environment, by implementing policies and procedures that limit the use of fossil fuels, electricity consumption, and improve air quality systems. The district has replaced their hot water heating generation equipment at the middle school and high school, and activated solar power generation for approximately 66 percent of electricity needs. They have also moved to a near-complete LED-based lighting system in the district. Also, at Charlestown Elementary outdoor learning spaces were created to enhance students' access to the natural environment around them through outdoor learning games, a nature trail and more.

Valleys

Just when it looked like things could not get worse, discussion of the school bond referendum reached new lows. Last week a former Hopkinton Town Council member advocated for posting on Facebook the salaries of all Chariho employees. Also, unfounded claims of corruption and conspiracy have become the norm for bond opponents. Bond supporters and Chariho administrators have been chastised for not being from the area, and other opponents claim that an influx of outsiders are responsible for increasing taxes. Richmond's Town Council President, who has not set foot in our schools, is calling for an investigation of why schools have not been

maintained. He also complains about being unable to afford a tax increase while contributing twice the amount of the anticipated tax increase to the Forgotten Taxpayers. The true agenda of the opposition groups is not taxpayer advocacy. If it was, they would be supporting the cheapest and most efficient option for our aging school buildings. Their true goal is defunding Chariho until it fails and then advocating for funding to be “redirected” to private schools.

Other Items of Note

On April 30 the RI Ethics Commission dismissed one of the two complaints pending against Town Councilor Michael Colasante finding that there does not exist probable cause to believe that Colasante violated the Code of Ethics. The complaint by Councilor Rich Nassaney claimed that Colasante voted to award paving contracts to D’Ambra Construction while at the same time D’Ambra was performing work at Colasante’s Buttonwoods Sawmill. Nassaney submitted photographs of equipment with D’Ambra Construction lettering at the sawmill as the basis for his complaint.

The Ethics Commission conducted an extensive investigation that included subpoenaing documents and interviews. The investigation revealed that Colasante had an agreement with Richmond Ready Mix to provide pre-cast concrete blocks for a retaining wall and perform grading work at the sawmill. Richmond Ready Mix is owned by Trusts in the name of David D’Ambra, Daria D’Ambra and their father Michael V. D’Ambra. David is primarily involved in the operations and Daria does the accounting for Ready Mix. Michael V. D’Ambra’s trust also has an ownership interest in D’Ambra Construction. Although David and Daria D’Ambra have no ownership in and are not employed by D’Ambra Construction, each receives regular payroll checks from D’Ambra Construction.

David D’Ambra told investigators that the equipment seen at Colasante’s sawmill with D’Ambra Construction markings was either borrowed by Ready Mix from D’Ambra Construction; or was owned by Ready Mix or Richmond Sand & Stone, but the D’Ambra Construction markings had not been removed. Although Michael V. D’Ambra’s trust has ownership in both D’Ambra Construction and Ready Mix, there was no evidence that Colasante knew that. Colasante only dealt with David D’Ambra and the quote he sought was from Richmond Ready Mix. Colasante claimed to be unaware of any connection between Richmond Ready Mix and D’Ambra Construction.

Because David and Daria D’Ambra are not owners of D’Ambra Construction they did not benefit from the paving contracts. Michael V. D’Ambra has an ownership interest in D’Ambra Construction and Richmond Ready Mix, but there was no evidence that Colasante knew that when he voted to award the contracts to D’Ambra.

The investigation of another complaint against Colasante by Council President Mark Trimmer remains pending. That complaint claims that Colasante participated in discussion and votes concerning the job performance of former Electrical Inspector Jeff Vaillancourt at the same time Vaillancourt's company was performing electrical work at Colasante's sawmill.

Opinion Corner

We can't say it any better than these recent letters to the editor from The Westerly Sun

Letters to the Editor

Why I'm voting for the Chariho bond

So much has been written here both for and against the Chariho school bond referendum coming up on May 7. It saddens me to see the education of our children caught in the cross-hairs of a political battle. However, I remain hopeful that all the towns in the Chariho community will rise above the naysayers, recognize the one-time opportunity to get new elementary schools with 76-81% reimbursement from the state coffers of our own tax monies, and vote to pass the bond.

Here is why I, retired on a fixed income, with no children or grandchildren in the district, and no relatives working in the system, will vote YES, without reservation:

The proposed plan is thoughtful and well-designed to meet the evolving needs of the Chariho School District. It has been years in the planning and is not a rushed initiative, but this is our last chance to meet the June 2024 deadline to be able to access the maximum reimbursement, which by the way comes from state tax dollars we have already paid!

I recall that the RYSE to CALA project faced similar vocal opposition, but was completed on time and BELOW budget — projected at \$5.9M and came in at \$5.5M. Chariho Regional School District has a verifiable history of successfully completed building projects.

Having served on the CALA Building Committee in 2017, I have personally witnessed the commitment to stay within the budget and make hard decisions that minimize cost overruns and delays. I trust the appointed committee, which is set and ready to move forward, will do the same.

I will hold my nose and swallow the tax increase, because research consistently shows that communities with strong school systems, including current physical facilities, experience lower crime rates, higher property values, and greater overall prosperity, all qualities that I cherish for my home town.

I am privileged to have worked and lived in this community for 20 years now, and have recently come to the conclusion that increasing the revenue coming into Hopkinton is a

necessity; there comes a time to face facts. Rising property taxes cannot sustain rising costs of our obligation to educate our children and maintain our town. Scrimping along will eventually dismantle the high-achieving school system that is one of the area's crown jewels.

As a member of the recently revived, after 17 years dormant, Hopkinton Economic Development Commission, I will work tirelessly with the Town Council to increase the revenue coming into the town, keeping an environmentally friendly and sustainable perspective. We cannot continue arguing about the same things and expect different results.

If you care about the future of Hopkinton and the Chariho School District, get out and vote on May 7, or vote early at Town Hall now through May 6. I hope you will seriously consider a vote to APPROVE the referendum.

**Etta Zasloff
Hopkinton**

Chariho district can't afford to do nothing

The Chariho district is faced with an important decision regarding the school construction bond vote on May 7.

The proposed school bond gives us an opportunity to rebuild three elementary schools for a cost to Chariho of \$36 million, with the state of Rhode Island picking up the rest of the \$114 million cost. This is a good deal for Chariho taxpayers who want to improve the infrastructure available to our youngest learners, while also decreasing the tax burden of building maintenance and operation. This opportunity exists because of a statewide bond in 2018, approved by Rhode Island taxpayers (including Chariho taxpayers), to fund new school construction and improvement. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get a tremendous amount of state aid to tackle the major upgrades needed in the Chariho district.

Our elementary schools aren't getting younger, the plumbing isn't going to get better on its own, the HVAC systems aren't going to spontaneously improve, and there's no room for new insula-

tion. The issues are a result of the age of the buildings, not neglect. These are problems that don't go away if we're not looking at them. We can pay for them now, we can pay for them next year, or we can pay for them in five years. But ignoring them just makes them worse, and just makes them more expensive.

If this bond fails, we will still be asked to use bond funding for repairs, but we will not have the same increased rate of reimbursement, and our repairs will not last as long as an investment in new buildings.

Some have expressed concerns over the risks associated with labor markets, construction costs, and other uncertainties. These are certainly very valid concerns, and exist with any major project. However, these problems don't get better with time, they only become more difficult. In five years, it'll be the same problems, but it will cost more to fix them, and taxpayers will have to pay more of that bill, because the increased state aid has expired.

Just as important, we have an expert

group of Chariho residents on our building committee. They are ready to take charge of the project, listen to input from the Chariho residents, and guide the effort to success. They have been empowered by the School Committee, the towns and the state to make sure that Chariho gets the results from the construction project that it needs. The project will evolve, and if you have concerns, you can attend the building committee meetings to make sure the schools that Chariho builds meet its community's needs. But we're never going to have a better chance of improving the elementary schools in Chariho than we have this year.

I'm going to vote for the bond on May 7, because doing nothing isn't a solution that helps any of the actual taxpayers or their children.

Doing nothing is not a solution, and will ultimately be more costly for our taxpayers.

**Christopher Kona
Richmond**

Community Profile

The Invaluable Role of Volunteer Firefighters in Rural Communities

In rural communities across our country, volunteer firefighters serve as the unsung heroes, providing essential emergency response services that are often the difference between life and death. These dedicated individuals selflessly offer their time, skills, and courage to protect their neighbors and communities from the devastating impact of fires and other emergencies. Great examples of the significance of volunteer firefighters can be seen in the Richmond Carolina Fire District and Hope Valley Wyoming Fire District, where their commitment and service have proven to be invaluable.

Rural areas face unique challenges when it comes to emergency response. Limited resources, vast geographical areas, and fewer people working in the community where they live make the presence of volunteer firefighters crucial. These volunteers are the backbone of rural firefighting, providing rapid intervention during emergencies, conducting vital community education on fire prevention, and offering support during natural disasters. Hope Valley Wyoming has one of seven recognized HAZMAT teams in the state, and the only one that is volunteer.

Richmond Carolina and Hope Valley Wyoming relies heavily on the dedication of volunteer firefighters. Although volunteers, the training given is the same as for professional fire fighters. Their commitment to training, responding to emergencies, and serving their communities is a testament to the immeasurable value of volunteer firefighting in rural areas. These individuals are not just responders; they are pillars of strength and hope for their communities.

As the need for volunteer firefighters continues to grow, we urge individuals to consider signing up for this invaluable service. The impact of one volunteer can resonate far and wide, safeguarding lives, property, and the very essence of rural communities. By joining the ranks of volunteer firefighters, individuals can make a meaningful difference and be part of a legacy of service and resilience.

We are helping to get the word out to our community in the hopes that individuals may consider heeding the call to become volunteer firefighters. Information on how you can become a volunteer firefighter and contribute to the safety and resilience of your community check out their websites. Richmond Carolina <https://www.rcfd.org> and Hope Valley Wyoming <https://www.hvwfd.org/>.

Upcoming Meetings

May 7 – Chariho School Bond Referendum – 7 am–8 pm at Town Hall

May 8 – Town Council – 6 pm at Town Hall

May 14 – Planning Board Meeting – 6:30 pm at Town Hall

May 14 – School Committee Meeting – 7 pm at Chariho High School Library

May 16 - Chariho Building Committee – 6 pm at Chariho High School 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 Calendar

Chariho FFA Plant Sale

Saturday May 11 8am - 1pm at Chariho Greenhouses, 453 Switch Road, Richmond
Vegetables, annuals, hangers and more on sale

Richmond Recreation Summer Camp 2023

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. We also welcome any tips or items of concern that you wish to bring to our attention.