



**Richmond Community Alliance**  
Encouraging constructive community engagement and action

## **NEWSLETTER**

No. 9 January 21, 2024

### **Peaks**

#### ***Richmond Community Alliance Friend-raising Event this Thursday***

This Thursday, January 25, RCA is hosting a public meet & greet from 6:30–8:30pm at the Richmond-Carolina Fire Department (208 Richmond Townhouse Road). Stop by to learn more about Richmond Community Alliance, meet the steering committee, and share your thoughts on living in Richmond. Light refreshments will be served. Every attendee will be entered in a raffle to win one of four gift cards to local businesses. We look forward to seeing you!

#### ***Residents Make Us Proud***

Chariho student and Charlestown Richmond Fire Dept member Chaia Elwell makes us proud with her quick thinking and taking action to help a choking person at Raising Cane's in Johnston. [Chariho High School student saves choking man at newly opened Raising Cane's | WJAR](#)

Richmond Police Chief Elwood Johnson, Jr. was inducted in the Criminal Justice Hall of Fame at the R.I. Attorney General's office on January 18, 2024. Established in 2012, the Rhode Island Criminal Justice Hall of Fame "honors outstanding professionals who have worked to improve and uphold the principles of the criminal justice system in Rhode Island."

Scott Barber and James Brear step up to serve on the Economic Development Commission.

### **Valleys**

#### ***Town Council Members Again Push to Micromanage Hiring***

Town Council members Colasante and Sheehan persist with efforts to micromanage the hiring process of town employees. With the opening of the DPW Director position on the horizon (Scott Barber retires February 1), the two once again insisted at last week's council meeting that it was their right to review resumes and interview applicants, claiming that the Town Charter supports their position. The Town Charter ([Link](#)) states the following:

*“The Town Council shall appoint a Town Administrator to supervise the business of the Town government at its direction. The appointment shall be made solely on the basis of executive, administrative, and educational qualifications. The Town Council shall review the Town Administrator’s performance annually.*

*The Town Administrator shall be the chief administrative officer of the Town. It shall be the responsibility of the Town Administrator to:*

*Submit to the Town Council a list of qualified candidates for department directors. The Town Council may make an appointment from among the candidates submitted, may ask the Town Administrator to submit additional candidates, or may ask the Town Administrator to readvertise the position.”*

The current process abides by the Charter, with the Town Administrator reviewing applications and making a recommendation to the Town Council, which they can then accept (thus hiring) or reject. Nowhere in the charter does it state that Town Council members *shall* be members of the interviewing body or influence the applicants. This ensures the privacy of job seekers who are not selected, and allows the Administrator to do her job. At the meeting, the majority of council agreed to continue with the current process in accordance with the charter. The persistent efforts of council members to ignore the provisions of the Town Charter is concerning.

### ***Irrelevant lines of questioning for town volunteers***

During the discussion of James Brear’s appointment to the Economic Development Commission, Colasante asked Brear about what he called a “hot button issue”: Would Brear advocate re-zoning industrial and commercial property for affordable housing or low income housing? Residents should ask themselves why such a question is relevant to appointing a volunteer to the EDC that has no authority to make such a change. This is a dangerous step toward creating political litmus tests for appointment to boards and commissions rather than the person’s relevant experience and qualifications.

### ***Councilors less interested in information than their preconceived opinions***

At the most recent Town Council meeting, Chariho Superintendent Gina Picard provided a presentation to the Town Council summarizing the “Necessity for School Construction” effort that is ongoing between the school administration and School Committee. The purpose of the presentation was strictly informational. However, some of the Town Council members interjected their own preconceived opinions rather than asking questions about the proposal to arrive at an informed opinion. During the discussion, Council President Trimmer made some comments that deserve attention:

- That it would be cheaper to send each child to a private school. It is hard to fathom that an elected official would suggest such a thing. Even if Trimmer wanted to, private schools could not educate all Chariho students because they do not provide specialized services and support that many students need. So what happens to students with disabilities or special needs?
- Suggested that Chariho was seeking “platinum schools” without there being detailed plans of the schools’ features. Rather than ask about how the cost estimates were arrived at, Trimmer referred to his involvement with renovating the Varnum Armory Museum in East Greenwich. A museum with a maximum tour capacity of 20 people is very different from a school building that 500 plus people, mostly young children, use on a daily basis.
- After a person commented in support of the proposal and encouraged the Town Council to ask questions about the presentation rather than attack the messenger (Supt. Picard), Trimmer asked if the person had a family member that works for the schools. Yet another irrelevant question meant to question the motives of the messenger.

The largest mistruth propagated by several council members is the cost of the loan to taxpayers. Building the new schools or maintaining the old schools is not close to the “...\$300 per year per Richmond taxpayer...” many councilors were citing. Based on data provided by Picard, in the projected worst case scenario, maintaining the old schools for the next 5 years will require \$11.7 million from the three towns (this is 39% of the \$30 million “Warm, Safe, Dry” plan) over 5 years at an estimated 4% bond rate, which will add an estimated average of \$160 per year to the Richmond tax bill per resident (note that this will differ based on individual tax assessments and exemptions). The proposal for new schools provides the opportunity for longer duration bonds and the benefit of reduced operating costs, which is currently projected to cost the three towns \$28 million (19% of \$150 million) at a 4% bond rate over 20 years, which will add an estimated average of \$117 per year to the Richmond tax bill per resident (note that this will differ based on individual tax assessments and exemptions). Here is a graphic from Supt. Picard’s presentation:

<b>Current Bond Referendum Scheduled for April 2024</b>	<b>Current Prioritized Needs (for the main campus &amp; elementary schools) - no bonus reimbursements</b>	<b>Capital Only Repairs</b>
<b>3 New Schools + Campus bond</b> up to \$150M before State Aid will be a total cost of approximately <b>\$28 Million</b>	<b>Warm – Safe – Dry bond</b> will be a total cost of approximately <b>\$30 Million</b>	<b>Capital only (pay as you go)</b> will be a total cost of approximately <b>\$7 Million</b>
RIDE reimburses up to 81% achievable (61% + 20% of bonuses = 81%)	RIDE reimburses 61% achievable No bonuses available This is the current base rate for all of our work.	RIDE reimburses 61% achievable No bonuses available This is the current base rate for all of our work.
\$2.3 million cost to Chariho, paid off annually over 20 years	\$2.3 million cost to Chariho, paid off over six years	\$1.5 – 2.5 million capital cost to Chariho, yearly pending bond funding by FY27-9
New School Construction- Three New Elementary Schools with minor capital planning needs for the next ten years	Repairs only. A new five-year capital approval plan is required by law, and the RIDE Stage 1 and Stage 2 process for requests would once again be required to seek bonds of approximately \$20-\$30M in needs	Inadequate to meet needs, a new bond for renovation or Warm-Safe-Dry must be considered within the next three to five years and would not have the same outcomes as new school construction

## **Other Items of Note**

### ***The Preserve Completes Sale of \$11 million Condo***

The Preserve recently sold a condo for close to \$11 million. According to news reports and the realtor Multiple Listing Service the unit is about 4,600 sq ft of above ground living space with 6 bedrooms and 6.5 bathrooms. Richmond's tax assessment of the unit is \$4,561,000 based upon 3 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms with 2,231 sq ft of above ground living space. The plans submitted to the town show 3 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms. The Preserve claims the unit has a value of only \$1 million (10% of the sale price) in its appeal of the town's tax assessment. Clearly something is not right here. Is the Preserve telling the town one thing and building something very different? Are there other similar situations at The Preserve? More investigation is needed of this situation so the property can be properly valued and assessed for its fair share of taxes.

## **Community Profile**

### ***Richmond Reads***

This local volunteer-powered tutoring program is designed to provide literacy support to students. Volunteers will receive training to tutor students and foster multigenerational connections in our community. The first session will begin in late February at Richmond Elementary School. This program is a collaboration between Richmond Human Services Dept and Friends of Chariho with assistance of educational professionals.

If you want to volunteer sign up at [tinyurl.com/RRvolunteer24](http://tinyurl.com/RRvolunteer24)

## **Upcoming Meetings**

January 23 – Chariho School Committee Special Meeting – 5:30 pm at High School library

January 23 – Planning Board Meeting – 6:30 pm at Town Hall

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

Town Council Agendas can be found at <https://clerkshq.com/richmond-ri>

School Committee Agendas can be found at

[https://www.chariho.k12.ri.us/school\\_committee/meeting\\_schedule](https://www.chariho.k12.ri.us/school_committee/meeting_schedule)

## **Community Calendar**

January 24 – Well water workshop – 6–7 pm at Chariho Middle School auditorium, sponsored by Richmond Human Services Dept, URI and RI Dept of Health. Residents can learn how to protect one of their most important home investments and how to keep their drinking water safe. Sign up by calling 401-874-5398 or <https://docs.google.com/.../1qKE36.../viewform...>

## **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.