

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Richmond on the twenty sixth day of March 2019 A.D. the said meeting was called to order by Town Council President Frank Landolfi at 7:00 P.M. in the Chariho High School Library, 453 Switch Road, Wood River Jct., RI 02894 immediately following the call to order by the Chariho School Committee Chairman Ryan Callahan.

**PRESENT:** Hopkinton Council President Frank Landolfi, Council Vice-President Scott Bill Hirst, Councilor Sylvia Thompson, Councilor Sharon Davis; Town Manager William McGarry; Town Clerk Elizabeth Cook-Martin. Councilor Barbara Capalbo arrived shortly after the meeting convened.

The Hopkinton Town Council had been invited to attend the Chariho School Committee Meeting as each member Town's State Legislators were to be present.

The Meeting was called to Order with a Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silent meditation. Representative Brian Kennedy was present.

#### **COMMISSIONER'S CTE DECISIONS**

Donna Chambers wished to discuss the CTE decisions. Representative Kennedy advised that he may be the only person in the legislature who represents the Chariho District that signed onto a bill dealing with the CTE issue. That bill, R5266, was submitted by Representative Evan Shanley and would amend the law governing career and technical education programs to provide standards in curriculum as well as additional opportunity for students and provides a tuition formula for certain reimbursement levels. Mr. Kennedy indicated that he had sent many emails to the superintendent from residents, particularly from the Coventry district, whose children are going to another school. There are several communities dealing with this issue, including Warwick, Chariho and Coventry; and, there is another meeting planned for April to attempt to work out the language of that bill. He also advised that he has heard from Westerly who was not happy that he was a close sponsor of this legislation, but his hope is that they can work out some language that will make everyone happy. He is aware of a

current lawsuit and indicated that he has never seen so many lawsuits due to bad decisions made by Commissioner Wagner, despite laws and signed agreements. Ms. Chambers agreed and indicated there is a new Commissioner who was appointed by the Governor. Mr. Kennedy stated that she was not the Commissioner yet and hadn't been through the vetting process and was not yet approved. Ms. Chambers suggested that if she is approved as Commissioner, this issue should be called to her attention immediately for some of these tech programs that have cropped up are quite inferior to what Chariho is offering. She feels there has to be some logical, reasonable reason for a child to go out of their own district, which has a very high standard for their programs, into a district with inferior programs.

#### **SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL RATES**

Chairman Callahan indicated that the solid waste disposal rates are an annual problem. Mr. Kennedy indicated that he had introduced House Bill 5639 on February 27, 2019 and received a letter from the School Committee in support of that. The bill is currently in the Municipal Government Committee and would benefit Chariho as well as all of the regional school districts. Mr. Kennedy received a copy of a letter from Joe Raposa, Executive Director for the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation, sent to Joseph Solomon who is the Chairman of the Municipal Government Committee, which thanked him for allowing them to speak on this legislation. This bill would provide that solid waste collected and disposed of by, on or behalf of regional school districts shall be charged the same tipping fee per ton as the municipal rate. Rhode Island Resource Recovery is not opposed to the application of the municipal tipping rate for this material, provided that the associated volume counts towards the municipal solid waste caps established in accordance with RI General Laws. The capping system and two tiered fee structure is one of two incentives used to drive local waste diversion and to extend the life of the central landfill, exempting regional school district material from calculation of the municipal caps would be a departure from what is otherwise required and would negatively impact the State's solid waste management system. Municipalities already have the ability to allow their school districts, regional or otherwise, to tip at the subsidized rate in

accordance with the associated capping requirements. Twenty-six of the state's cities and towns already grant this ability to their school districts to one degree or another including some from three of the states for regional school districts. The local contact person is Jared Rhodes from Hopkinton, listed as the Director of Policy and Programs. Mr. Kennedy felt the letter was positive feedback; however, suggested it would be helpful to have a Senate companion bill. He believed the School Committee should encourage Senators to put forth a companion bill. Hopkinton Town Councilor Hirst asked if there was a March deadline for submitting a bill. Representative Kennedy responded that in the House there is no deadline for city and town legislation and he believed the Senate could still introduce legislation. William Day acknowledged that this bill needed community support and he wondered how much feedback was received from Town Councils on bills that affect Chariho. Hopkinton Town Councilor Capalbo indicated that it was her understanding that municipalities have a particular tipping fee and schools have a different tipping fee. Superintendent Ricci indicated that they would have a higher fee if they were unable to tip at the municipal rate. Councilor Capalbo asked why non-regional schools had a municipal tipping rate, but not regional schools such as Chariho. Representative Kennedy indicated that this matter was being discussed by the RI Resource Recovery Corporation. He did not believe this issue had ever been addressed and that was why he is attempting to address it with this legislation. Councilor Hirst thought that Hopkinton might be the only town in the regional school districts to have an agreement with a non-regional town regarding solid waste. Mr. Kennedy indicated that his goal was to take what each of the towns currently might have and reduce it down because he didn't know how much ultimately counts towards the cap. He would like to see Resource Recovery set a cap amount for each regional school. Superintendent Ricci indicated that they are studying the school's tonnage and are looking at ways to reduce it, but it would greatly assist them if they were tipped at the municipal rate.

#### **TRANSPORTATION CATEGORICAL AID**

Chairman Callahan indicated that he was baffled by the transportation categorical aid in that the regional districts are shorted over 17% of what the regulation

requires. Representative Kennedy indicated that Superintendent Ricci, Senator Dennis Algiere and he had met with Kevin Gallagher (the Governor's Education liaison) on January 2, 2019, specifically to talk about this. Mr. Kennedy indicated that in June of 2018 he had spoken with the Governor and let her know how displeased he was that this was occurring every year. Governor Raimondo told him that she would make sure that they would sit down with him prior to introducing the budget; however, the budget came out two and a half weeks later and once again we had been shorted. He believed that he would have to go back to the Speaker and ask to restore money, which is what he has to do every year. One issue that keeps coming up is that the numbers we are using seem to differ from the numbers that the budget officer for the House is using. He is waiting to see what the revenue estimating conference comes back with in early May which will give us an idea of what we brought in for sales tax which will tell us how much we brought in for income tax; then when it becomes time to make the final recommendations we will hopefully see that pick up. Mr. Callahan asked if the percentage requested came directly from RIDE and Mr. Kennedy indicated that Mr. Gallagher had told them that RIDE did put in a request to raise it higher, so ultimately he was unsure who made the bottom line cut to this. Superintendent Ricci stated that RIDE did request an increase in transportation categorical aid of \$462,000 for all the regional districts and it was level funded at the Governor's level.

Senator Dennis Algiere arrived during this discussion and indicated that Chariho was a very well performing school. Superintendent Ricci advised Senator Algiere that they were looking for a companion bill regarding the solid waste disposal rates. Mr. Callahan indicated that the current transportation cost to the district represents 8% of the general fund budget; that is up over 11% from where it was three years ago. Transportation costs are \$4.8 Million Dollars and this is not related to education. Representative Kennedy stated that as part of the whole transportation issue, the Superintendent contacted them about the recent action with DCYF regarding a student from Richmond and Senator Algiere indicated that he had spoken with DCYF as well and was not happy with them. Mr. Louzon thought that the theme they were discussing was that the State makes promises

and then does not follow through. Superintendent Ricci indicated that it was more expensive to use statewide transportation for there was no way of knowing what the bill will be. He advised that we actually transport some of our kids on our own buses and do it less expensively; and, we are being billed in full for the DCYF placed students even though the federal law says that there is no cost-sharing agreement and the L.E.A. is not responsible for transportation; however, the Commissioner has billed all of the districts for 100% of the cost of transporting DCYF students.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT OF CHARTER SCHOOLS**

Chairman Callahan indicated that there is a growing cost to the district for charter schools but a lot of that is off-set because we benefit from out of district students coming into Chariho Career & Tech programs. Mr. Callahan questioned if school choice was going to be a priority. Representative Kennedy indicated that he has not supported a Charter School and Senator Algieri advised that he is very careful on his votes concerning charter schools because the impact on the local school districts has been very significant. Ms. Chambers indicated that originally the concept of charter schools was to pilot, showcase, and use new technology and new techniques in education; and then, those ideas and what they learned was supposed to be shared with the public schools. She does not see this happening. She felt by sending their children to charter schools, their parents were getting a more private education for their children at the taxpayers' expense. She does not believe school choice should be at the taxpayers' expense. Representative Kennedy indicated that charter schools do not have to accept every child that applies; they can pick and choose who attends. Mr. Day didn't feel that taxpayers should be paying to send children to a charter school when Chariho is a high performing school. Clay Johnson supported the right for parents to choose what school they wished their child to attend. He was very concerned about the concept of condemning somebody from putting their child in a government school based solely on their zip code if they cannot afford a private school. He felt the biggest cost was regarding transportation for these children.

### **STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION COSTS**

Mr. Callahan stated that upon listening to Representative Kennedy, it is really unclear as to how the requested amount deviated from what the intent of the General Law states it should be, and how that figure was derived. Mr. Callahan questioned how this could be resolved in a permanent way. Senator Algieri indicated that they try every year to put legislation in to cover the costs; and, Representative Kennedy indicated that one of the recent decisions made by the State this year was to award a transportation contract to a company called MTM which was primarily utilized by people going to and from medical appointments. He advised that during the testimony of the House Oversight Committee with MTM, it was announced by the State that they were fined One Million Dollars as a result of negligence. As part of the whole process, when the CEO of MTM was present Representative Kennedy asked him what they were doing to assist in rural communities for RI Public Transit Authority is very limited in our area. MTM announced that they were currently applying for grants in order to offer more services in the rural communities and this may be an approach that the school district can look at. Mr. Callahan asked who sets the out-of-district transportation cost. Mr. Kennedy stated that one of the reasons they met with the Governor's people last June was due to the issue that came up with the student who was going to Narragansett to participate in a sport. We asked them to explain what they were doing to address the local communities that now have to bus students out of their own district because this Commissioner has made another bad decision; and according to them, they were not aware of how much it was actually costing the district. Mr. Callahan asked again who sets that cost, who establishes what the district is going to be charged? Superintendent Ricci indicated that this was set by Statewide Transportation but there was no way to know what it is going to be and Representative Kennedy added that every district is facing this same problem. Councilor Capalbo noted that not only are we paying for our own school transportation costs but we are also paying for Central Falls and Woonsocket and they are distressed communities. She believed these costs would only go up.

#### **SELECTION OF NEW COMMISSIONER**

Senator Algieri indicated that he did not select the proposed new Commissioner and he knew very little about her. Mr. Day stated that he had asked for this matter

be put on the agenda because he is against Commissioner Wagner. He is hoping that the Senate will take the time to find out what the new Commissioner's philosophies are concerning how she will treat the taxpayers and the cost of education. Mr. Day advised that if Chariho has a problem with the Commissioner they have a hearing and the hearing officer is someone that the Commissioner sends to listen to their problem. Due to this, they were not getting a fair hearing. Senator Algieri indicated that this was the administrative process but stated that Mr. Day was absolutely right. Mr. Day suggested, since there was a new Commissioner coming in, that they organize a Blue Ribbon Commission in order to effectuate a more fair appeal process. Councilor Hirst was concerned that the new Commissioner of Education had come from New York City and he was unsure of how she would deal with rural and suburban communities. He also suggested that the legislatures and General Assembly step in and use their authority pursuant to Article 12, Section 1 of the State Constitution to set some of these education policies straight.

Chariho School Committee Chairman Ryan Callahan called for a recess. At this time the Hopkinton Town Council would adjourn.

**ADJOURNMENT**

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR THOMPSON TO ADJOURN.

SO VOTED

Adjournment was at 8:30 PM

Elizabeth J. Cook-Martin

Town Clerk

Marita D. Breault

Deputy Town Clerk