

RSU2 Withdrawal and Transition Process Update and FAQ

By Liana Knight, Transition Team Member

Withdrawal Process and Timeline

Richmond voted to withdraw from RSU2 in the election on November 8, 2022. That kicked off a process that has been underway for the past few months and will continue over the next several months leading into the new Richmond School Department taking over all school operations on July 1, 2023. Until July 1, we are still under the RSU and all school administrative functions are handled by the RSU. Through June 30, 2023, our Richmond school board members remain part of the RSU2 school board and we direct any questions about things happening this year through the RSU2 Central Office.

While we remain part of the RSU until July 1, the transition process between November 8, 2022 and July 1, 2023 is a crucial time because it involves making sure we get set up and are ready to take over all day-to-day school operations as of July 1. While it might seem like a July 1 date for taking over operations gives the new Richmond School Department a 'grace period' in which to figure things out over the summer, this is not really the case. There are people who will need to be paid and receive benefits over the summer months, there are special education students who need services over the summer, there will be facilities and maintenance questions to handle over the summer, and throughout the summer there will be necessary preparations underway for the upcoming school year. So there is a lot to navigate in this in-between time, while we are still part of the RSU and are not yet completely on our own.

Following the vote to withdraw from the RSU, the Selectboard discussed the transition committee on November 14, 2022 and appointed a three-person committee on November 28, 2022. The three people appointed to the transition committee were: Amanda McDaniel, Liana Knight, and O'Neil LaPlante. The transition committee held its first meeting on November 29, 2022.

The Transition Committee was charged with moving things forward as much as possible between the end of November and the beginning of March, when the new Richmond School Committee will take over. The special election to elect members of the new Richmond School Committee and to approve limited funding for use in the transition process will be on March 7, 2023. The new Richmond School Committee will take over the transition process after that election.

For the past few months, the Transition Committee has been gathering information and working to formulate recommendations for the forthcoming Richmond School Committee. The School Committee will have authority to make decisions that the transition does not have the authority to make, e.g. decisions about hiring a Superintendent. At the beginning of January, we were able to bring Jack Turcotte into the process as a consultant. Mr. Turcotte is an experienced Superintendent and educational administrator, who has brought invaluable insights into this process. He will continue to consult with the new School Committee until the School Committee hires a Superintendent. We also asked Irene Adams to participate as a volunteer to bring her business acumen to our meetings. And we are deeply grateful to Town Manager Laurisa Loon for all of the time and energy she has put into helping this process move forward.

Where do things stand?

The Transition Committee has met several times over the past three months. We are working on:

- Making sure we have all the information the Richmond School Department will need about property, contracts, staffing, etc.
- Working with Town Manager to get set up with a TIN and legal entity name
- Generating drafts of policies
- Exploring administrative staffing needed for a Richmond Superintendent's Office
- Exploring software needed for a Student Information System, Business/Accounting System, Website and emails
- Thinking forward to what needs to be in place when to make the transition feasible on July 1
- Drafting budget information for the March-June 2023 timeframe as well as for FY24

We will be handing off all of our work to the new Richmond School Committee after they are elected in March. The Transition Committee will then disband.

What is the Richmond School Committee?

On July 1, we will become a municipal school unit. We will be governed by a 5-person School Committee. A School Committee has the same functionality as a School Board or Board of Directors. It is simply the term used to describe the governing body for a municipal school unit (a single city or town having their own school system).

What will be the first steps for the incoming School Committee?

The incoming School Committee will be tasked with several big jobs that need to be acted on right away. There will be additional responsibilities, as well, but some of the biggest things are:

- The School Committee will need to determine how to handle hiring a superintendent, and will need to move forward with that hiring process as quickly as possible.
- The School Committee will need to work quickly to adopt policies for our new school district; there are a list of required policies (ones every school district must have) and then there are a lot of additional policies. Liana Knight has been working from draft policies to generate Richmond-ified policies for the School Committee to consider and approve.
- The School Committee will need to work quickly to put together a budget for FY24 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024) to be approved by the town at the annual budget referendum. We are grateful that Irene Adams, who was at one time the Business Manager of the former Richmond School District, has volunteered to help get that budget started during this transition committee phase of the process. Irene's work will be turned over to the new School Committee for them to review and fill in pieces still needed.
- The School Committee will also need to work quickly to put together a budget for the time from March 7, 2023 to June 30, 2023 in order to ask the Town for the funding needed to hire administrators and purchase software and hardware during this time.
- The School Committee, hopefully working with a Superintendent, will need to finalize some parts of the Withdrawal Agreement which were intended to be updated prior to the final break between the Richmond School Department and the RSU.

Who will be in our Central Office?

The startup work is immense and the transition committee believes it will be in the best interests of the school district to have a full-time superintendent as quickly as possible after the School Committee is elected. We will be making a recommendation to the School Committee about a path forward to get a superintendent in place quickly through the hiring of an interim superintendent. Other staff we will need to fill quickly are a Business Manager and an IT Director. We will need a Business Manager to get things squared away with payroll and accounts payable, and also to help us with a budget for FY24. We will need an IT Director to oversee the technology in use in the schools – everything from the website and staff emails to the phone system to all of the devices used by the kids.

What is the \$40,000 for?

The \$40,000 that we vote on in the March special election is money the town identified we would need to be able to hire a consultant and start to put some pieces of technology in place – e.g. a website. The website and email addresses for staff are connected (we want to share the domain name with the email address) so this is an important piece to get started since it will take time to build out.

Why have I heard that more money will be needed from town funds?

When the School Committee meets, they will need to consider what additional funds they will need in order to get the school district up and running prior to July 1. This will include salaries for any Central Office staff who are able to start prior to July 1 (e.g. Interim Superintendent, Business Manager, IT Director) as well as software and hardware needed to keep our schools running. We will need to have a Student Information System into which we can transfer all student data from the RSU2 Student Information System (currently the Student Information System is Infinite Campus). We will also need business software that can handle school payroll and accounting functions. In order to put such things in place prior to July 1, we will need additional funds appropriated from the town unassigned funds. The School Committee will determine what amount to request and will ask the Selectboard for that amount. Ultimately any amount that we determine we need will have to be approved by Richmond voters.

How will we make sure people continue to be paid through the transition?

All of the staff in the Richmond schools will continue to be paid by the RSU through June 30. To ensure that we are able to continue to pay staff beginning on July 1, we are looking into Business Software that will allow us to take over this function (this is why we need to hire a Business Manager as quickly as possible, and prior to July 1). However, we are also aware that it will take time to get set up, so we are also looking into possibly hiring a firm to take over payroll for a period of time to allow the Richmond systems to get up and running.

What will we keep vs. lose to the RSU?

We have been looking into the physical property within the schools. Amanda McDaniel has done extensive work figuring out what belongs here and whether anything here belongs to the RSU. It is nitty-gritty work that looks at everything from technology devices to buses to mops. It is our belief that everything in the physical school buildings will remain. We will also keep our buses; however, there is one remaining question about buses involving a bus that was listed in the

Withdrawal Agreement that has since died and a bus that is not listed in the Withdrawal Agreement that was leased by the RSU to replace the dead Richmond bus. How the dead bus and the leased bus are handled is yet to be determined.

Who will we keep and lose as far as personnel?

We will retain all teachers and staff who spend greater than 50% of their time in Richmond schools. There are a few positions that are 50/50 and we need to figure out what happens for those individuals. We will also need to figure out what happens for individuals who have been split between schools – some percentage in Richmond schools and some percentage in the RSU. Having a School Committee and Superintendent will allow us to start to make more definitive determinations about what happens for these individuals as far as full-time vs. part-time work and/or whether they somehow continue to work for both Richmond and the RSU. We will also need to determine whether there are positions that we will need to fill because of losing staff who work in Richmond schools less than 50% of their time.

This is a small snapshot of the work that has been ongoing this winter, the work ahead, and the decisions that are ahead for the School Committee. Once we have School Committee members, we hope to have them get set up with email addresses pretty quickly. In the meantime, please direct questions through Town Manager Laurisa Loon: townmanager@richmondmaine.com, who will be able to forward questions to the appropriate person.