

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
ARPA COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes
October 20, 2021**

Members Present: Dave Baczewski, Greg Barrows, George Lamphere, Nanette Rogers, Bill Hill, Martha Heath

Members Absent: Bree Drapa

Also Present: Callie Hamdy (Minute Clerk), Dave Lavallee

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

MINUTES

There were no previous minutes to approve.

COMMITTEE CHARGE

Dave had made a few changes since the last meeting. The charge is to adhere to the authorized usage of the ARPA Funds and to facilitate requests and make recommendations to the Selectboard about which ideas should receive funding.

Martha made a motion to approve the Committee Charge as written, Greg seconded. Motion passed 6-0.

COMMITTEE ROLES

Dave had drafted roles and responsibilities for each member. Dave as the Chair would go over milestones and deliverables. Greg's experience as treasurer for the Town would crossover well to this committee. Martha would keep track of feasibility and fiscal compliance. George would work on process and facilitation to work with the groups and individuals that submit proposals. Bree would hopefully take on outreach, communication, and facilitation. Bill would work on the rubric and process. Nanette would be responsible for administration, public warnings, and minutes were to be taken by Minute Clerk Callie Hamdy.

Bill would also like to see an overview and perspective of where we are on a consistent basis. This would be part of the treasurer's report and milestones.

COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

A collaborative Google drive had been set up and the committee is scheduled to meet every third Wednesday of the month through December at 7 p.m. in the Westford Library.

Dave thinks making a group email will be important. He and Nanette had worked with VT Connections for some initial samples of what that would look like, but it is looking like a different solution will work better for the group. Dave asked Bree to set up a Google linked email. Nanette suggested a Google Groups email might also work well as Commissions in town have used this method with success. Dave's only concern with an email that would connect to

Committee members personal emails would be clogging up member's inboxes. Dave and Bill expressed that they had no issue with this.

Dave explained that although the Committee was not bound by Open Meeting Law the way boards and commissions in town are, we are following the general process for best practice and transparency. **Clarification (added post meeting to avoid any future misunderstanding) - The Westford ARPA Committee is bound by Open Meeting Law.**

Katie Buckley, the VLCT Director for ARPA Assistance and Coordination will be joining the Committee for discussion on November 17, 2021. The committee discussed an ARPA online seminar that was attended by Dave and Nanette that focused on a lot of the state specific programs that will be happening. It is Dave's desire that Westford focus on projects that are timely and get results for the town itself. Dave would like to lean on Seth Jensen's knowledge of state specific programs. Additionally, an ARPA Committee page had been made for the Town Website. This is where the minutes will be housed and can be a place to direct interested parties for information. The committee expressed desire for a separate website but will look at that in the future.

Dave had given communication to the Selectboard on the HVAC to be discussed by the board itself. The committee is at a spending pause until they have shaped the process for submission. The discussion the Selectboard had at its meeting had to do with concerns town office employees had regarding Covid. One of the items that came out of that discussion was a discussion about using ARPA funds to make recommended purchases to mitigate potential health concerns in the small office space itself. Devin Porter, Health Officer, had assessed the office. Some of those potential items will come forward at a future meeting. Bill was understanding of the purchases we had made prior to the submission process but expressed that such spending was a slippery slope. Dave explained that the Selectboard's intent is to use the submission process, but that the issues they are trying to mitigate in the office are emergent. Martha trusted the Selectboard's decisions but thought it may be worthwhile to talk to them about the process. Dave thinks these items are exceptions and the Selectboard is trying to keep the ARPA process and Town Budget process very separate.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Greg's vision was to do this in the same way the Treasurer's Report is done for the Selectboard meetings. He wants to create a chart of accounts that identifies where the money is being spent. In broader categories, the sixty-six items could become an account number and a subset underneath depending on how specifically we wanted to track things. What is briefed in ARPA Committee meetings would also be briefed at Selectboard meetings.

George asked if there was any value in tallying the Phase I and Phase II amounts that are being considered? This would help us see how big this is to the community. Martha thinks the rubric will help us decide what projects should be considered for funding. Greg was thinking that this would be a list of the submissions so we can decide how to properly allocate the money that we do have. Greg will pull some rough drafts together for the next meeting. Bill offered strong

support for George's proposal; it would increase transparency and understanding of where everything is going.

Greg gave an update on Administrative Fees for the Minute Clerk and Treasurer. Dave had pulled a Best Practice for Accounting from VLCT that suggests creating a separate fund in the General Ledger to account for and report more easily on these funds. The money would also gain interest as it sits which could be a net positive for the town. Greg thought it may be worth it to shop around for the best bank and type of fund.

Martha asked if the Selectboard gives an amount of money to a submission/organization would it be a grant or would it be just us giving them money? Dave clarified that we could decide how the money is given so we as a committee need to be careful on how complicated we make the process. Greg thinks we should keep things simple. Martha thinks some of our decisions on how the money is given may depend on the submissions we get and the potential projects.

Katie Buckley explained that NEMRC will soon include a 'plug and play' lost revenue calculator. Katie states we should explore, as we may be surprised by the result as ARPA accounts for 4.1% annual growth rate. Any lost revenue can be recouped via ARPA funds and placed in the General accounts. She also states that these funds have little to no restrictions on spending.

By the end of December Dave would like to present a Funding Release Schedule. We are going to figure out a flow of the projects, the process must build in how they go forward to the Selectboard for approval. Martha thinks at some point we may want to have a discussion on how many projects are going to come with our first proposal two years from now and do we want to put money aside for that possibility or do we think people are going to come with their projects up front and we should get the money out the door and to work? Bill thinks it will be the latter option. Project tracking is a good idea, which was agreed upon by Dave and Greg. This would hold projects accountable and ensure that all the money is being spent so we do not run the risk of losing that money. Dave explains that we as a town must show that our money was spent on those larger monetary requests. George sees that there is one process that explains how much money we are willing to release on potential projects and another for how that money is released for those projects, this is part of why the Committee was formed.

We have three years to allocate the money and five to spend it. George asked that if a project has been allocated money but has not spent it after the third year is that money lost, or can it be reallocated? Dave was unsure, but agreed it was a liability. Greg thinks it would be wise that we have a backlog of approved, but non-funded projects in case we do get money back for any reason. If that were to occur, we would not have to go back through the whole process.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

George led the discussion on Phase I and Phase II. Dave would like to have Phase I to ARPA Committee final on the 15th of December so he can present it to the Selectboard by the end of the year. The proposed phases are Phase I (initial Proposal), Phase 2 (Final Submission), Phase 3 (Selectboard Decision), Phase 4 (Execution), and Phase 5 (Completion, Review and Closeout). Bill thought it would be a good idea to add tracking to Phase 4.

George began by explaining that he wanted the Phase I form to be easy to fill out and get to us. Phase II digs deeper and he thinks the schedule, spending plan and rate during this phase will be important. It is also at this Phase where it becomes closely tied to the rubric. Martha thought that George's draft form was great. She thinks instead of the Phase II form they send the applicant the rubric. Nanette thought a sheet that goes with it explaining what criteria it meets would be helpful. George thinks the Rubric will have to have an area that captures the Committees' thoughts and recommendation. Dave explained that what is important to the Selectboard is for them to understand the full scope of the project and that the rubric should provide the substance for their decision making and capture the committee's scoring. Additionally, a clear recommendation of what kind of funding would also be ideal. Dave's thought is that the ARPA Committee members each individually score the project so that all members have equal weight so they can see areas of disagreements and areas of discussion. Then a final score will be brought together on the final decision/recommendation to the Selectboard.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

Bree and Martha had met and used the Survey George had gotten from VLCT as a template. They thought that survey was too complex and aimed for a simpler survey that would make sense to the community. They provided a front page that explained the money we have received and the general process. This survey will give an overall sense of what the community's priorities are and how residents rank those priorities. George thinks the ARPA money will help change our world here in Westford and it is important to get a sense of how many are engaged in the ARPA funding and what people want for the town. A digital Google form will compile a lot of the information for us, but it will also be important for us to provide a physical form. George asked if the survey would be anonymous or named. He was concerned that singular people would be submitting multiple times. Martha explained that was not a high concern, but we could put language in warning people to only submit one. This however does suggest submitting more than one to people. Dave thinks it is a step, but not all the steps, to receiving input. Bill believes this is a crucial transparency tool as we can then provide the results of the survey to the public.

Dave made suggestions for the survey relating to readability and grammar. He also wanted to make sure those filling out the survey are clear that this survey is just for information and is not in lieu of an actual submission for ARPA funds. Dave will be penning an article for the November 2021 Newsletter that will also inform about the survey and ARPA in general. The committee had hoped to have the survey out by this day, Dave would like Martha to implement the minor changes suggested and put it out. Discussion covered the upcoming newsletter deadline and the changes that needed to be made on the survey. The committee agreed to put in the informational section in the newsletter without the survey in lieu of sending the survey information to the newsletter mailing list at a separate time, even mailing out surveys to those that receive the newsletter physically. The survey will go out prior to November 1st and responses will be due on November 19th.

RUBRIC DEVELOPMENT

There was a list of line items that Bloomberg had been reporting on. Bill suggested the members each choose three items that they like and three that they do not and why, and he will try and capture those themes. This would be to get the committee's thoughts on what traits should be in the rubric. Dave did not want to pre-assume any projects. Martha thought it would be odd to do that prior to getting the results of the survey, she thinks it is important that it fit into the four groups. Dave is cautious to get out in front of town input for ideas because it starts to mask our intent on transparency, and we do not want to get tunnel vision.

The process that Bill had provided was good and would allow us to practice our process prior to having to implement it for actual requests. This will let us know if the rubric works or not. Bill's points were: what makes a good rubric? One or more traits that serve as the basis for evaluating a proposal, definitions, or examples to clarify the meaning of each trait, a scale of values, and a standard of excellence for each level w/examples or models.

The committee discussed the draft Assessment Rubric Outline and suggested changes to do with wording and overall clarity. Bill will work with George to work the rubric into the Phase II form.

MILESTONES AND DELIVERABLES

Dave provided milestones and deliverables to the committee.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.